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A HIDDEN WELL

LOUIS HOW

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**LYRICS AND SONNETS
THE YOUTH REPLIES:
BARRICADES**

**SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY
Publishers Boston**





NEW YORK
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1912

ЗАДАЧИ КОММУНИСТИЧЕСКОЙ
ПАРТИИ В ВОПРОСАХ
КУЛЬТУРЫ И СПОРТА

A HIDDEN WELL
LYRICS AND SONNETS

BY
LOUIS HOW



BOSTON
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY
1916

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June 24, 1930

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TO
GERTRUDE McDONALD

NOTE

Rachel Comforted and *Epitaph for a German Soldier* are reprinted, with the kind permission of *Harper's Magazine* and of *McClure's Magazine*, respectively.

The *Tuscan Song* is based not upon the original, number 924 in Tigri: *Canti Popolari Toscani*, but upon the German arrangement of Gregorovius, in his charming review of that book. He changed the form and, to some extent, the prescribed content of the *rispetto*; but he made it a better poem. The Italian shows that it is a girl who speaks: for obvious reasons I have followed my leader in making it a man.

In this volume there are no intentional metrical peculiarities. There is a stanza-form, — in *Waiting*, — which I believe to be as uncommon in English as it is common in Spanish. Its dignity and grandeur may not be here apparent.

The only possible excuse for the sonnet about the little graves might be that the tale is true.

Out of respect for my friends I have used a "true" rhyme only once. I constantly am adding to my list of established poets who used them, and am convinced that they should be recognized and taken advantage of. Anything that will increase the number of rhymes (not false) will be a boon to people who still write and read formal verse.

L. H.

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LYRICS

TUSCAN SONG

ADAPTED

DEAR Rose, dear blossom of roses,
Will you avoid me? Speak clear.
For many a day I've loved you,
For many a month and year.

Through hours and months I've loved you,
In sorrow as well as in glee:
Dear Rose, dear blossom of roses,
Give my heart back to me.

Through months and through years I've loved you,
With heart and body and brain:
Dear Rose, dear blossom of roses,
Give me my years again!

IMPATIENCE

IF I were only unhappy enough
I shouldn't note the indifferent eyes,
Or care that the holiday crowd is rough,
Or hear my own long sighs:

Should neither ache for a new true friend,
Nor wish to the old their due deserts,
But patiently wait till I saw the end,—
Dear death, who never hurts.

TO JOHN DONNE

You give a complex thought a common word,—
But one or some that no man ever heard
Together juxtaposed:
You know no thought or feeling so complex
That verse cannot explain us how it vex,—
A thousand have you glosed.

You find no thought or feeling's germ too plain.
Your poetry does not descend, disdain,—
But rises with its theme:
You know that every fibre passion owns
Is passion's very body, blood, and bones,
And glowing with its gleam.

You show us that the truth is so intense
It has no need of outward ornaments
Or prettiness of rhyme:
That only utter candour, large and straight,
Must be maintained to make us equal fate
And play the joke on time.

WHAT, LOVE?

O LOVE, what is it now you bring?
The crape or crown?
You open not your lips to sing,
You do not frown.

You see how trustingly I run,
And reach to take.
Deal kindly, Love,— or else, have done,—
For service' sake!

A SACRED ROSE

THIS rose, the moment that you went,
Became a relic, and exhales
A very sweet and holy scent.

And it will still be brave and stand,
While not a hint of colour fails,
Till you again are close at hand.

I dread the days when absence grows
Too long to measure by a rose,
Whose faded petals still retain
A fragrance poignant as a pain.

SICKNESS

So LONG your eyes were dim and dull
I scarce recalled your very eyes;
Your voice that could arouse or lull,
Had only whispers left, or cries.

Not candidly your hand now clung,
Your words were querulous or cold,
Your plaintive smiles were seldom wrung
By tenderness forever bold.

What hideous silences I broke!
And how? The time we lived was blank,
About the past we never spoke,
And from the future only shrank.

At last a peaceful morning came:
The face I saw was yours by right;
For death removed disease's shame,
And brought a sorrow I could fight.

RACHEL COMFORTED

SHE watches little children sleep,
She wanders where they play;
And she has neither tears to weep
Nor words to say.

A little boy she thinks a girl
Has eyes she sees as blue,
And chestnut hair,— for her, in curl
And blond of hue.

Interminably shall she wait
For death to break the spell;
And meanwhile beat on heaven's gate
And stare at hell.

The half her heart hath ceased to be;
The remnant is forspent.
No longer desperate is she,
Nor yet content.

CONVICTION

SHE said, "He is coming."

They answered, "It's late."—

"Then I will be strumming

A tune while I wait."

"He's ill or departed

Or busy," they said.

She eyed them, brave-hearted,

"Well, then he is dead!"

NEVER ANY MORE

NEVER any more

The lonely waiting in the gloom
For a knock upon the door,
A footstep in the room!

Never lonely gazing
At the driven rain,
Or at visions blazing
On the hearth, again!

If I dream and wake and cry
In the middle night,
You are lying there, and I
Know that all is right.

MOLOCH

O BARREN god whose face is veiled,
Whose hands are innocent of gift,
Who spare the worshipper that failed,
Whose prize is pain, but never swift,

Whose worship is a secret cult,
Which if admitted turns to shame,
And never brings but this result,—
The playing well a loser's game:

How modest are your dogged tribes!
What sting and itching each endures,
Because a stupid world ascribes
To love, a service only yours.

SOPRANO'S SONG

A NIGHT of water dripping,
Of redolence, and birds. . . .
But surety is slipping
And doubt is deaf to words.

The misty moon uncovers;
I cower in my bed.
I'm worn away with lovers,
And you were better dead.

FOR THE "CARNAVAL"

I

AVEU

You lightly lean your little form
Against a heart desires oppress.
I feel your figure close and warm,
My careful fingers curl a tress.

I feel a great incumbent word
Unspoken in the atmosphere.
You lean to me as though you heard.
I bend to whisper in your ear.

II

MARCH OF THE DAVIDSBÜNDLER

How do we know the truth!
Well, how do we know the light?
And when we awake, what means do we take
To verify day or night?

We bring the proof: we bring our work,
Nor look aloof where loafers lurk.
And every mountain-heaving shoulder
Renders the neighbouring one bolder.

So on we pass and on we march,
To build a brass-outliving arch.
In paint and word and song and stone
We make the laurel-tree our own. (*fine.*)

Open your window and in will pour
The light of the sunshine to gild the door,
And the broom of the breezes to sweep the floor.

Evening will crowd with the stars your sill,
And the music of night; or, if night be still,
With a darkness and calm more ecstatic still,—
A pause in the storm of youth;
But — (*da capo*).

A MESSAGE

An unexpected twilight breeze
That gilds the glimmer of the bay
With tiny breakers like the 'sea's,—
As wantonly and wanly gay,—

In coming through a certain place
Has taken on a certain scent;
And I sit fixed with iron face,
Receiving messages not meant.

FORTITER OCCUPA PORTUM

TAKE the port strongly!
Rightly or wrongly,
Here's where we've sailed to, and here we will lie.
Yes, there were winds, but the pilot was I!

Now I am anchored,
Fill me a tankard,
You that were watching the wind as it blew.
I was the pilot, the harbour is you!

FLOWERS AND TIME

TO C. R.-R.

How gay your autumn garden glows,
With colours clearer than the rose!

How straight and tall
The zinnia and marigold
Stand up, awaiting winter's cold,
Which, in a day, or only two,
Will come with sparkling frozen dew
And kill them all.

Your sun-dial for a weary space
Will wear a snow-drift on its face,
And who shall know
On shortest days, how long they are?
For though the little ship-wrecked spar,—
Its gnomon,—bravely reaches out,
'Twill cast a shadow all about
On naught but snow.

When hyacinth and violet
Returning, help us to forget
The winter's deeds;
And, where the frost lay overnight,
We find the fragrant borders bright,—
Though we, these sunny days in spring,
No longer heed time's hurrying,—
The dial heeds!

LOVE'S QUESTIONS

If you, whose gaze profoundly probes,
 Could only enter in and see,—
Burned like a brand upon the lobes,—
 The thought within the brain of me,

There then would be no further need
 For idle question,— none for faith. . . .
Who knows but you would stare and read
 And vanish, a dejected wraith:

Because vitality goes out
 When it has neither cause nor scope;
A love that left no room for doubt
 Would have as little left for hope.

To know the best destroys the best,
 And sets a better up, unknown. . . .
So I with an insistent zest,
 Will match your questions with my own,

And with a stab of joy await
 The only possible reply,—
Or, if you seem to hesitate,
 With momentary terror die.

WAITING

We wait to welcome death
Who pushes back the portals of the void,
Relieves us of the breath
Wherewith our souls are cloyed,
And gives us the repose that life destroyed.

We blush to show the sun
Our wasted memories and faded scars:
We would the night were done
Whose dreary, mocking stars
Drive, on the jewelled plain, their gradual cars.

Our heads are old, and whirl,
Too tired and too heavy for our necks.
We gladly yield that pearl,
The privilege of sex,
And all its joys and drunkenness that vex.

So oft that we forget,
We've risen just because the day arose,
And found it not time yet
For us to move to those
Who lie awhile, and are not, and repose.

But we can wisely wait;
For he will take us all by force or stealth,
To realms devoid of fate,
Where none want joy or wealth,
And all share equal silence, peace, and health.

THE TENOR'S SONG

MAKE me tender, make me true,
Make me keep on loving you.
You are slender, you are wise,
You have planets in your eyes.

Fix me, fold me, keep me fresh,
Guard me bravely in your mesh.
Have me, hold me, show me well
All that love can never tell.

Then when time has come to part,
Separate me from your heart:
Set the rhyme to ended bliss,
And release me with a kiss.

STRANGERS' CHARM

THERE ' none so well worth knowing
As strangers in the street,
Or any people going
Like those we never meet.

No merriment approaches
The talk we all but hear.
A neighbour's laugh encroaches,
And turns our pleasure drear.

The whispered tender phrases
We nearly intercept
Re-open magic mazes
We've walked in while we slept.

The guessed-at love that lingers
And flourishes next door,
Has marvel-making fingers
And wings whereon to soar.

Do they suspect, the others,
What miracles they are?
I wonder, have I brothers
Who envy me afar?

MERE LIVING

WHEN the dark is quite unstirred
By any twitter from a bird,
I hear a quivering of trees,
Like one who turns to lie at ease.

I feel the throbbing of my blood:
And, dropped aside from fancy's flood,—
Life's intricate and endless whiz,—
I think: Here's living, as it is!

I live,— I cannot even think.
I look upon the stars and blink.
I only walk and breathe,— a clod
That cast a shadow on the sod.

I cannot stop my works that ply.
When chance arrests them, I shall die. . . .
Till then, by day, my life must be
Wrapped up in things outside of me:

By dark, I can but muse or sleep,
Or feel the feelings old and deep
That frighten me, if night be stirred
By any twitter from a bird.

TO AN INTERNED AUSTRIAN

Look up; beyond your prison tent
The crescent like a cup is bent,—
 The sky around is bright.
Let hope fly up and wet her lips,
No longer grope where reason slips
 And stumbles in the night.

Behold, the stars are risen,
And shining on your prison!
And having memories to chew,
There's no heart-hunger here for you.
The very husks of love are sweet,
And so, fall to and eat.

Look east; the blushing dawn has run
To usher in the timid sun,
 Who hides his face. . . . But hark!
Nay, listen to the sound above.
Is that the whispering of love?
 Is that an English lark?

Behold, the sun is risen,
And shining on your prison!
A memory long kept is stale:
And yet complaint is no avail. . . .
Of course a soldier must be brave,
But so can be a slave.

ONE TRUTH

A LAND-LOCKED bay at noon,—
Our listless flag is furled.
Our hearts are glad in tune,
Far from the war and the world:

Far from our fellow men
Who die in deep disaster.
When shall they know us, when
Shall they know that love is master?

A thousand sunk at sea,
And a million shot on land:
The time will never be
That men will understand.

The truth will not prevail
Because it is not true;
For all its force must fail
For any more than two.

So men shall grieve and kill,
And women groan at birth.
But in the silence, still
Will heaven bloom on earth.

And here our land-locked bay,
Walled round with warmth and air,
When we are gone, will stay
To hold another pair.

SONNETS

IN THE CITY

TO R. AND R. W. K.

To one who always lives upon the land
How solid is cement beneath his feet!
The glimpses of the sky he gets are sweet;
Amid the whirr, the clouds of smoke are bland.
The street is full of palaces that stand
All hospitably open to the street.
The parks can offer tired men a seat,
And sometimes, growing musical, a band.
At ends of dusty cañons evening burns.
The lights are frozen rockets, million-starred.
The gongs and horns and strident wheels are loud.
And on the ample sidewalk, who discerns
May read the faces, wanton, wistful, hard,
Of all the human units of the crowd.

THE CLOISTERS

You look beneath the Gothic traceries,
Across the turf: your view is bounded there
By tranquil meeting of a mirrored stare,—
The opposite arcades reflecting these.
Old mortuary dim Latinities
Adorn the walls: and here is cooler air,
Reëchoing but languidly the blare
The distant city sends above the trees.
Where once the monks were measuring the shade
And murmuring the prayers that mark the hours,—
Who knows with what nostalgia for the strife? —
We loiter, wishing destiny would fade;
And long to barter hope's eternal flowers
For such a chance to dream away a life.

DELIVERY

I LAY my soul for keeping in your hands,
Who are more dear than passion's utter bliss,—
A thing of your creation. Unto this
I've wandered many miles in many lands,
And lingered in voluptuary bands,
And tasted to the full their facile kiss,—
That, risen strong from honey-sweet abyss
I lay me down by one who understands.
The world is good, but heaven is above!
The fruit of pleasure finally must cloy:
I'm sick of apples, nourish me with love.
I'll not abuse the bosoms where I clung;
But happiness is other than their joy,
The sweetest songs are those they left unsung.

PIAZZA DEL POPOLO

I THANK the many men who made this place!

How oft I've felt when crawling home at night,

When weariness was heavy, courage slight,

The comfort of the broad and wholesome space.

Solid it stands, serene, and full of grace,

All reasonably open to the light!

The sun is hotter here, the stars more bright;

It cheers me like a well-beloved face.

'Twas made by human fingers, so secure,

It lasts when all the fingers are at rest.

The country-side will alter, stones endure.

This is the friendly city at its best.

The seasons change, hearts change, the pavement's
sure;

'Twill answer true to any lifetime's test.

SHEPHERD AND CHÂTELAINE

FOR A PICTURE

Down from the hills the flowing meadows float,
The afternoon is innocent of time;
You read aloud a dreamy rolling rhyme
And marry it to hidden heron's note.
Against my flank your silken petticoat
Recalls a moment crimson as a crime.
Love's long, and from its intervals will climb
To lay a luring hand on laggard throat.
And meanwhile rest and reticence are well!
May every minute mutely mock the last,
While I recline and listen at your feet.
I catch the coming evening's cooler smell!
I lie between the future and the past,
And know, like one the other will be sweet.

MEETING IN HEAVEN

SHE still was youthful when the first was born,
And scarcely any older when it died.
Three more arrived in turn, and barely cried
Ere they were hushed and she again forlorn.
What power of grief she still retained untorn
She spent o'er tiny headstones side by side. . . .
But growing very old, her tears had dried,
And people all forgot they'd heard her mourn.
She acted more dispassionate than brave;
So we were all astonished: — not a text,—
A dialogue, was carved above her grave.
It rather seemed ridiculous to some
Whose hopes were more in this world than the next,
To read there: “Children!”—“Yes'm?”—
“Mother's come.”

WHAT LOVE IS

SPENSERIAN SONNET

You call that love, which felt its peace at stake,
And lay through all the ages darkness kept,
From midnight until after dawn, awake;
And wet its pillow with the grief it wept:
Then turning to the wall, a little slept,
Until, aroused to wakefulness by woe,
It stared upon the timid day that crept,
And wondered, was the loved-one true or no. . . .

I call this love: — a little girl shall go
And fetch her doll held tightly in her arms,
And smiling, sing, and rock it to and fro,
And shield it from imaginary harms.
Her love without a thought of no or yes,
Does not demand return of tenderness.

WAR NEWS

SPENSERIAN SONNET

THERE's not a person passing in the street
But reads or talks or thinks about the war;
And every chance acquaintance that I meet
Is keen to say the same old things once more.
I could have chattered like the rest, before,—
About the cultured German smashing Rheims,
The sufferings the patient Belgians bore,
The riddle of the Russians and their dreams:
But now, above the chattering it seems
I hear a silence terribly untouched,
Beyond the daylight see a moon that gleams
Above a soldier lying with gun clutched,—
His mouth that spoke to me but lately, gone,
His eyes wide open, staring on and on.

ADOLESCENT DESIRE

I KNEW not what I needed: yet I knew
That somewhere in the dismal bounds of space,
Beyond the city's hard and dingy face
Which formed the dusty garden where I grew,
There hung a happy sky of white and blue,
O'er meadows where a shaded soul could pace,
And e'en in wary waiting find a grace
Because the time was running smoothly through:
Because the grave companion of a dream
Would edge into the company I sought,
And fix the shooting star whose vagrant gleam
'Twas nature the immutable had wrought,—
Transforming to a swiftly blissful scheme
Expansions where my very self was caught.

NON OMNIS MORIAR

Not all of me shall die. The corporal frame,—
A little season mine,— will decompose;
And these my bones, and this their fleshly clothes
Will live in other forms with other name.
My soul will then return to whence it came,
Within the utter void where nothing goes:
Clean vanished, like the odour of a rose,
Or like last night, or like extinguished flame.
Should all the particles that were all me,—
For not a single one is ever lost,—
Combine by chance in one ecstatic tree,
My mind could never tell it, "I thou wast,"
Because my mind would then no longer be
To realize the sunshine and the frost.

LABOUREUR'S FRIEZE

IN THE MUSEO PIO-CLEMENTINO

GREECE lives again forever in this frieze,
Where faun in utter bareness, bassarid
In ripples of her garment hardly hid,
Are dancing as if balanced on a breeze:
Or, throwing back their heads against their knees,
And waving staffs and quarters of a kid,
Are dancing as the wild bacchantes did,
The tempest of whose shrieking tore the trees.
As once the fancy caught them, they are fixed,
And, white on white, move only in our minds,—
For all our eyes behold is flawless form.
The little laughing leopards intermixed
Uplift a warning paw. . . . The gazer finds
That, heated by the dance, his blood is warm.

ONE KIND OF LOVE

THERE is a real, evanescent flame
That springs from flint and steel of meeting hearts,
Whose sudden radiancy lifts and darts,
And lights a universe no more the same.
It runs in waves of rapture through the frame,
Transfiguring the bosom where it starts.
Incontinently dying, it departs,
And vanishes as quickly as it came.
And who shall say 'tis any less sincere?
Does candour choose a slowly crawling act?
How oft a lovely moment flashes clear
To die in birth! The roses we protract,
Are no more true for being longer here.
And is a flash of lightning not a fact?

THE OVERSE

SPENSERIAN SONNET

TO H. W. G.

WHEN young Domitian tortured flies in Rome,
Where luxury was rampant and afraid,
Where golden lust was drunk with golden foam,
And braggart force was pompous in parade;
Some miles away, within an Alban glade,
A couple tilled a farm 'twixt wood and sky.
They fed on fruit and cheeses that they made,
And grumbled when the price of salt was high.
But they were happy often: time went by
And moulded early love to mild content.
And when the morning dawned for them to die,
'Twas with regretful homesick sighs they went.
No record gives a notice of the pair.
Our fancy sees, but surely sees them there.

ASSURANCE

I GIVE you this assurance when you weep
Because I'm hard and critical and cold:
The night will come, perhaps ere you are old,
When you abed, unvisited by sleep,
Will offer any god the hoarded heap
Of hope and pride and memories and gold,
To have again a brutal hand to hold,
To hear a voice reproaches render deep.
In your uneasy dreams you'll see my face,
Nor ask if it be anger or desire
That flashes in my eyes,— but leap in space
To burn again in any passion's fire.
And waking up with no one to embrace,
You'll weep again in longing for my ire.

EPITAPH FOR A GERMAN SOLDIER

He thought his country right and loved her well.

He marched a hundred miles on bleeding feet,

And crouched in puddles with a crust to eat,

A bloody crust that had a powder smell.

He sang to drown the roaring of a shell:

The vision in his eyes was very sweet,—

He saw a flower-bordered German street,—

And with a clean French bullet-wound, he fell.

And those that loved him never are to know

If he was even shovelled in a trench,

Grotesque and grim who was their fair delight.

From that sweet seed but recollections grow. . . .

Without a ray of hatred for the French,

He fought for what was wrong, but he was right.

INGRES

If colour be immoral,— even yours,—
We love the sin you deaden and refine.
Your drawing mocketh God and is divine:
His handiwork expires, this endures.
Perfection 's a specific, and it cures
When eyes disgusted, glutted, crave a sign.
How curative is every golden shrine
To which your name,— not needed there,— allures!
Immoral, hardly; but immortal, yes,
So long as colour clings upon the form
You model to receive its pallidness:
For only in your colour are you cold;
Your tiniest of pencillings is warm,
And faultless as a carving cut of old.

MANTEGNA

SPENSERIAN SONNET

TO J. B.

How tenderly the holy mother's hand
Is firm to brace the patient swaddled child
Stood up on end! . . . How well they under-
stand,—
The high priest's eyes, all-knowing, stern, and
mild!
How straight his curls of snowy beard are piled! . . .
And how resigned is every pair of eyes!
Till we who gaze on them grow reconciled,
By finding men serenely calm, and wise.
And placidly we feel a faint surprise,
Because we see the crowded group grow great.
The guarding angels help us then surmise
That genius when sincere can conquer fate.
The neutral shades intensify and shine,
The rigid figures softly turn divine.

CARLO CRIVELLI

SPENSERIAN SONNET

Of gold the intricate and rich brocade
That smothers every opening of space:
With daring care the jewelled robes are made,
The curling locks, and each dramatic face.
Thick, heavy, fruity garlands deck the place
Where, on a golden throne, in silken glow
The Virgin sits. Half-held in brusque embrace,
A crooked child, with eyes of wistful woe
And coral locket, stands and stares below;
While saints in satin gowns of ruddy sheen,
And hair precise, are planted in a row,
Intently gazing. All is gold between.
The curving heat and burnish of the whole
Disturbs, and yet arouses, heats the soul.

ELEGY

I BRING no word of sorrow to his grave,
Excepting for the few that miss him, dead.
For him who bravely smiling ploughed ahead
I welcome rest, for he in vain was brave.
A wealth of laughter and of jests we save,
Besides the little pictures overspread
With lovely lights that early evening shed
On wood and meadowland, on moor and wave.
My comrade oft in cottages and camp,
He's left the quiet noises that he loved
For silences he well believed are void.
With patience but with glee he trimmed his lamp;
And ere death's hand had touched him, softly
gloved,
He suffered life, and yet how keenly joyed.

UNCERTAINTY

UNCERTAINTY and love are close of kin:
And as the one is double, so are both.
You mix convincing kisses with an oath;
But soon as you are absent, doubt slips in.
'Tis not the whimsies jealousy can spin,
No crawling breed of fondness's fat sloth,—
But queries (doomed to die, and nothing loath)
If you are very certain deep within,—
If you are any certainer than I,
Who love you wildly, love you not at all;
Who think, were I to lose you, I should die,
Then almost wish you lost beyond recall;
Who sometimes turn "I love you" to a lie,
And sometimes find a world without you gall.

CASTELLO DELL' OCRA

FOR A PICTURE

ALOFT against the big Abruzzi sky,
Degraded to dull gold the castle stands,
Amid its broadly sloping barren lands.
Ah, how the barren years go slipping by!
No more the soldiery with banner high
And eager face, march out in flaunting bands.
No hooded hawks are perched on jewelled hands.
Ah, how the world burns out, until it die!
The last retainers' children moving down,
Have left no name within the neighbouring town.
The gate is locked, the key is carried far.
And by the open breach in Ocra's gate
What robber cares to enter? Desolate,
The castle bears no beacon but a star.

AN IDEAL GARDEN

BEYOND the wall of ornamental box
The roses march demurely past the pool.
And nowhere is the garden half so cool
As here where mosses drip from rustic rocks.
The sultry aspidistra and the phlox
Are bending to the bees we cannot school.
Our manners we can trim to formal rule,
Like trees,—like gilliflowers trained to stocks;
Our memories hunt honey. . . . Mine will roam
To where the patient granite rims the sea. . . .
I'm there upon a morning free from foam,
When clouds but show how blue the sky can be,
And all the barren cape, my spirit's home,
Is beautiful with blossoming, for me.

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